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Broadcast Editorials

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I'm one of the most liberal people I know, but there are a few things that really bother me about one item on the extremely liberal agenda...the legalization of marijuana.

I've heard all the arguments about it...hemp could save the forests because it's a wonderful source of paper...marijuana cures glaucoma...marijuana is less addictive, less physically harmful than alcohol...and I'm willing to concede that all those things may be true...that it might be a good idea to legalize marijuana for medical use.

But something about the idea just bothers me. It's terrible, but I just can't take most of the people who support legalization seriously, not because they lack good arguments, they have a few, but because the subject of the arguments is kind of silly.

Look at these people. They're impassioned, they're angry, they want results, they want change. But they're not talking about a great national tragedy...they're not talking about how to eliminate the 300 billion dollar burden of the national debt...they're not talking about how to make sure each child grows up with equal opportunity, educated and ambitious...they're not talking about giving every citizen access to quality medical care...they're not talking about how to house the homeless, employ the jobless, cure the incurable, or right unspeakable wrongs...

They're talking about getting stoned.

There's no nobility in that, no self-sacrifice, no real benefit except light-headedness and a slight increase in snack food sales.

These people are selfish. They're greedy. They're out of touch. In an era of terrible economic upheaval, when the gap between rich and poor grows wider every day. When an incurable disease spreads rampant through our adult population, when Africa starves and Los Angeles burns, and someone with a college degree can't figure out how to fill out a tax form, they want something for themselves they don't really need.

They want dope, they want the right to get so blasted that nothing really matters to them, the right to be ignorant and brainless.

Aside from all the arguments for or against legalization, should we be addressing it right now. This country faces problems unprecedented in its history, questions that will fundamentally shape its future and that of its citizen; questions of poverty, health, race relations.

Let's solve a few of these problems before we all get wasted. The country would be a much better, although sober, place to live.

There is a battle raging in state courts across the nation, including Illinois. It is a struggle for equality, a cry for fairness. It is the voices of schoolchildren, pleading for the equal opportunity they believed was theirs. It is a legal battle to rip down the status quo, the current method the state uses to fund schools, to replace it with something new, something fairer. There can be no question that the current system is flawed and needs to be replaced. This is a battle the children must win, if this nation truly stands for equality.

Currently, school districts raise most of their money from local property taxes, a system that enables rich school districts to raise more money and offer more programs at a lower tax rate than poorer school districts. The system limits educational opportunity to those who live in rich areas and prevents the poor from sharing in the unique, quality offerings offered in richer areas. The Illinois School Board admits the problem, stating:

Illinois' wealthiest school districts spend more than four times as much money per student as its poorest districts. That difference...ranks Illinois sixth in the nation in education funding disparities.

Poor districts, with significantly higher proportions of students from low-income families, had considerably fewer

resources to help educate their children that rich districts.

State School Superintendent Robert Leininger expressed similar views:

That's not fair, it's not reasonable, it's not logical, and it can't be defended.

The bottom line is, it shouldn't make such a huge difference whether children live in district A as opposed to district B. They are entitled to comparable educational opportunities no matter where they live.

Those who would argue money doesn't make a difference, that financial resources don't automatically translate into a quality education, are blind. Money buys computers, it pays teachers, it builds buildings and pays utility bills. Money buys everything that makes a quality education possible. Without the computers, the textbooks, the science equipment, the facilities, the personnel that money buys, children can't get a good education. Money may not buy a good education, but it does buy the opportunity for one. Children from poor school districts don't have money, so they don't have these resources and they don't have an opportunity for equal education.

If money doesn't make a difference, then there is absolutely no justification for the disparities that exist among school districts. If money doesn't matter, then why does Winnetka need to spend four times as

much money on its schools as Harrisburg. If money is irrelevant, all the more reason to confiscate some of Winnetka's tax revenue. If money doesn't matter, they won't miss any of it and the state can pave roads with it.

These questions strike at the heart of our society. A society that is supposed to believe in equal opportunity for its youth; a society where initiative, effort, innovation, and determination are supposed to earn people success in society, rather than money. As a society we must decide the price we are willing to pay to give children everywhere equal opportunity. We must decide whether or not it is fair to condemn or reward the innocent based on factors over which they have no control, the wealth of their parents. We must throw away notions of class and caste if we are to be truly democratic.

In a country where there is no distinction of class, a child is not born to the station of its parents, but with an indefinite claim to all the prizes that can be won by thought and labor. It is in conformity with the theory of equality...to give as near possible to every youth an equal state in life.
Lord Acton 1861

Listen....

Listen to my words...

Listen to my thoughts, my ideas...

Listen to what I have to say...

Evaluate me...evaluate them on the substance of my speech...rather than the deceptions of my appearance...the illusion of my looks.

What will you think, robbed of your biased eyes?

Without my image to alter your reality...what will you see?

How do I look?

Where am I from?

What's my race...my religion?

How old am I?

How liberal...how conservative...am I?

Listen...

Listen to my words...

Evaluate them...think about them...instead of me...the expression that might be on my face...the color of my skin...the construction of my body...the clothes I wear...the room where I sit...or the tone of my voice as I urge you to listen.

Listen...and think about what you hear...think about what you might see.

You must decide what is reality and what is illusion...What is true...and what is imagined...

And in the end you'll never be sure of what you see and what you hear...

Listen...Listen and Decide.

Everybody remember all the outrage a couple of years ago over two hundred dollar toilet seats?

Well, we have something suspiciously similar right here at S.I.U.

Presenting...the twenty-six hundred dollar door...

Twenty-Six hundred dollars...installed courtesy of those frugal repairmen over at the physical plant.

Take a look at the 175 dollar light switch. We called some electricians to get their estimate on parts and repairs. They averaged about 25 dollars.

Seems a little outrageous in this time of tight budgets that the one division of the University that doesn't seem to be suffering is a non-academic one.

Seems like somebody in the University has a few misplaced priorities.

After all, the cost of one door could put a student through S.I.U. for an entire year.

Now I'm not saying that the Physical Plant doesn't have a good reason for charging such ridiculous amounts for simple repairs...But I haven't heard one yet.

If I've discovered one thing during this exercise, it is that persuasion comes naturally. Persuasion is an offshoot of communication. People have ideas and they discuss them with others. This discussion is usually a form of persuasion, varying in intensity and effectiveness depending on the topic of conversation.

And conversation is how the first editorial evolved. It came out of newsroom gossip, criticisms of the University, which are fairly common. Several people were outraged at the price the Physical Plant charges for what would seem to be routine, minor maintenance. Both texts emphasize the beneficial persuasive value of beginning an argument with a large amount of audience agreement. If the author can begin with positive audience reaction, his credibility may increase and the audience is more likely to respond favorably later to ideas that are not so acceptable.

The "Door" editorial begins this way, with an example that brought tempers to the boiling point a few years ago, the Pentagon Toilet fiasco. Hopefully the toilet example will get the audience riled up about wasteful spending enough to classify the next examples similarly. The concrete figures the Physical Plant charges for what most people would consider routine maintenance, if even that, especially when compared to the cost of

a non-university repairman, should persuade the audience to seek some kind of justification for the physical plant's prices. The audience should experience the same degree of outrage as the toilet incident, but this time direct it to the University Physical Plant, questioning its actions.

I'm not sure how to classify this editorial. It is an attempt to persuade people to evaluate arguments on logical grounds, but it is kind of an emotional, artsy attempt to do so. Both texts refer to pathos and ethos as essential parts of formulating convincing persuasion, but this editorial urges its audience to ignore those. I believe that audiences too often determine the soundness of an argument based on their perceptions of the character of the advocate. In other words, if somebody with lots of ethos told a group of people to jump off a bridge, quite a few probably would, and they shouldn't. This editorial is an attempt to prevent that. It is written simply and doesn't employ fancy rhetorical devices. It merely asks members of the audience to listen, to question the perceptions they traditionally have when evaluating arguments, to question the persuasion they encounter and assess it logically.

I consider Marijuana to be the best editorial of this collection. It is targeted at those people who haven't made up their minds about legalization and those who are leaning towards it. It is an attempt to

persuade those individuals to forget legalization, at least for the time being, to focus on other issues. It does this by attempting to weaken the credibility of those who are the strongest advocates for legalization, and by attempting to replace the issue of legalization with concern for other matters that might normally be considered more important.

I try to begin the editorial with a high degree of credibility among the audience by stating, "I'm one of the most liberal people I know." I attempt to maintain that credibility by conceding that some of the opposition's arguments may be true.

Having established credibility, I list several other issues that could be considered more important, such as education, health care, the national debt. A reasonable person could conclude that these topics are more worth their effort than is legalization, because they involve fundamental rights or threats to a person's physical well-being. This is an example of an enthymeme (I think), wherein the advocate makes two or more premises and draws a conclusion. The premises in this case are: 1. There are serious problems facing this country today, such as those mentioned above, and 2. Compared to those problems, the legalization of marijuana is minor, therefore, citizens should cease debate on legalization until the more serious problems are solved. This is a logical argument and should

be persuasive among the audience targeted.

The final editorial, as it turns out, seems to be more suited to print than to the broadcast media, due to the long quotations used as evidence within the paper. That evidence, evidence from the Illinois School Board and State Superintendent of Schools Bob Leininger, should be especially persuasive since it comes from authoritative, credible sources. They have a high degree of ethos, of authority, and should make the editorial stronger.

This editorial employs enthymemes also. Both are used to negate arguments against funding schools in a different way. The first has a line of argument something like this: 1. Children need good textbooks, teachers, equipment in order to have the opportunity of a good education available to them, 2. Money buys these things, 3. Therefore, money buys educational opportunity. The second reasons: if money doesn't make a difference, then it shouldn't matter how much or little a school district spends, therefore, school districts that spend large amounts of money on education are wasting resources, and it should be used for something else. The logic of these arguments is sound and should make good points.

Every project has some minor problems, and this was no exception. I should mention my disappointment with the amount of time I was able to

spend on this project. I would have liked to spend more, in a different way. I would have liked to write editorials regularly over the semester and have them evaluated periodically. I feel that this would have provided a greater opportunity to improve my writing and performance. As it stands, I wrote the editorials during the last four weeks of classes. I would have preferred a more gradual approach.

The texts were adequate. Although it provides excellent guidance, Aristotle's *Rhetoric* reads like Greek stereo instructions. It's a kind of How-To guide to persuasion. It's difficult to comprehend when read in its entirety (and I haven't read anything classical lately; I'm kind of rusty). *Persuasion and Influence in American Life* is easier to comprehend. It provided far more assistance during this project than Aristotle did. It deals more with analyzing persuasive techniques in communication rather than synthesizing them. It makes the reads aware of persuasion in everyday life, if not an expert on authoring it. I'd like to have a copy for quick reference.

On to the editorials. I enjoyed writing them, though I am not thoroughly satisfied with several aspects of them. I felt the education editorial lacks something, but I don't know what. My discontent possibly stems from a project I put together earlier in the semester having to do

with the exact same topic, but for news. It's an important, if complex, topic requiring extensive explanation. I don't feel I explained it very well. I am dissatisfied with the production qualities of the Door editorial, they could have been much better.

I've discovered that I'm not very good with managing the length of my editorials. None were under a minute, and perhaps that was a bit ambitious for my first efforts. I tend to be slightly long winded, a defect I intend to correct. But sometimes I had to leave arguments out: arguments that could have been especially persuasive. In this day and age, there is probably never an opportunity to hear all the arguments about an issue, so I suppose I should get used to the incompleteness of it all, and try to cram as much information as possible in the most meaningful way into my writing. I'm not certain I like the thought of that.

I also noticed that the editorials I consider better were written at one sitting, without much consideration for persuasive techniques. It isn't that I didn't give much thought to them; I had very definite opinions on the topics. I just sat down and wrote, and the editorial flowed easily on to my word processor.

I would like to devote more time to learning persuasive writing techniques sometime in the future. I certainly hope I have the time. If

anything, this project created in me an appreciation for those who are able to write effectively, and who do so on a regular basis with time and space constraints. I would still like to learn more. I would still like to become better. I don't consider this paper the end of my study of editorials, but rather a beginning. If nothing else, I now want to learn more, and that, despite all the other problems I had with it, makes it worthwhile.